

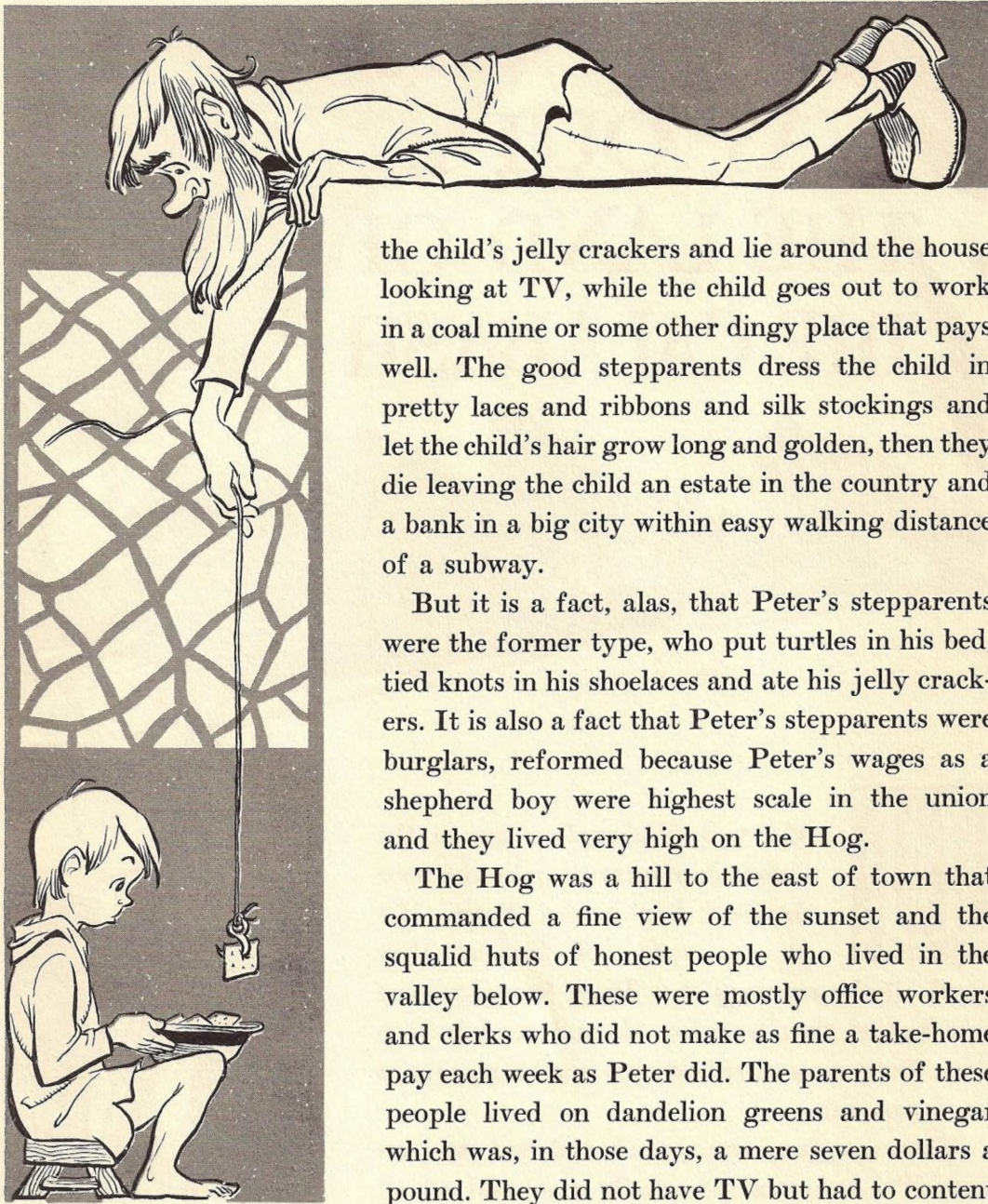
WAY OUT IN THE LAND OF THE CALABASH



MANY A Wednesday ago in the Calabash country there lived a poor shepherd boy named Peter. His parents were rich because they lived off the earnings that Peter brought home and besides they were not his real parents anyway. They were what is known in all fairy stories as stepparents.

There are good stepparents and bad stepparents. The bad ones are usually cruel and eat all





the child's jelly crackers and lie around the house looking at TV, while the child goes out to work in a coal mine or some other dingy place that pays well. The good stepparents dress the child in pretty laces and ribbons and silk stockings and let the child's hair grow long and golden, then they die leaving the child an estate in the country and a bank in a big city within easy walking distance of a subway.

But it is a fact, alas, that Peter's stepparents were the former type, who put turtles in his bed, tied knots in his shoelaces and ate his jelly crackers. It is also a fact that Peter's stepparents were burglars, reformed because Peter's wages as a shepherd boy were highest scale in the union and they lived very high on the Hog.

The Hog was a hill to the east of town that commanded a fine view of the sunset and the squalid huts of honest people who lived in the valley below. These were mostly office workers and clerks who did not make as fine a take-home pay each week as Peter did. The parents of these people lived on dandelion greens and vinegar which was, in those days, a mere seven dollars a pound. They did not have TV but had to content



themselves with reading the classics bound in leather. They were underprivileged.

There was one other peculiarity about Peter's parents, and this unusual fact made him suspect something was wrong. Indeed, it led him to the discovery that his stepparents were not really his own true father and mother. This happened when Peter learned to count.

As soon as Peter found out how to count up to three or four he decided to count his parents. He counted once and got up to three. This surprised him; most of the boys he knew had just two parents. They had a father and a mother, one of each, all neat and understandable. It seemed a little strange to Peter that he had three parents.

He counted again during the boxing matches on TV while they weren't paying attention. One was in the velvet chair with the tassels, one was in the leather chair with the beer stains, and one was lying on the couch with the Sunday papers. Peter looked around carefully. That was all, he was sure. The room had no more places to sit or lie. Except the floor. And Peter was alone on the floor.



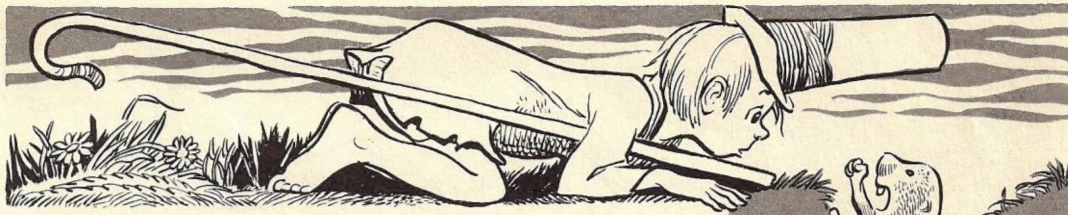


In a way, Peter was surprised, of course, but he was even a little more pleased. He had more parents than anybody. Another note of distinction that he appreciated was that all of them were men. Peter had seen some women one time and they had frightened him a little when they made soft cooing sounds and tried to hug him and kiss him.

He was glad that he had a man for a mother, and looking at the three great bearded oafs loling about, he wondered which one it was. Was it the red-headed man with the blue beard, the blue-haired man with the pink beard, or the green-bearded, bald-headed man with the patch on one eye? It was too much for him. He cuddled up and went to sleep on the floor, wrapped in the funny papers. It was how he usually slept.

The next morning as the three parents sent him off to work, they told Peter, "Now, don't go crying WOLF again today. You try that a little more and we'll all be out of a job."

Peter thanked them and hustled down the hill, through the muddy streets of the village, and back up the hill on the other side of town to the west. There he started looking around for a few



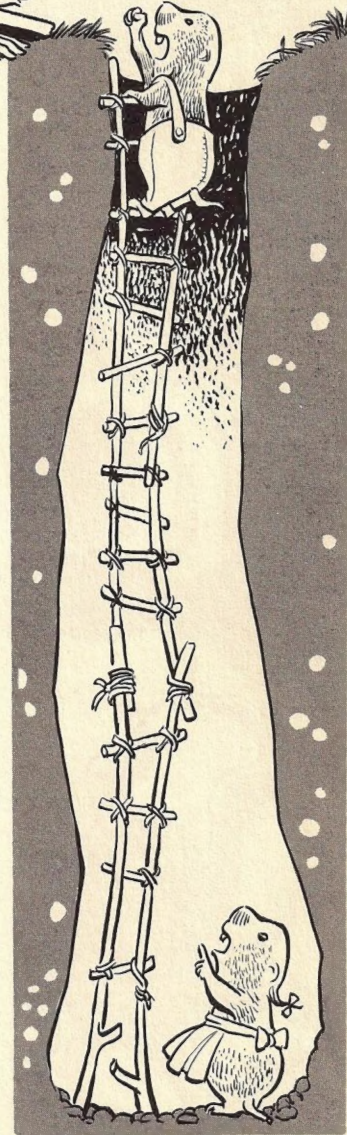
sheep to herd. He looked in the trees; no sheep. He looked in the lake; none were swimming. He went and poked in a gopher hole. The gopher came out and said, "How many times do I have to tell you we don't keep sheep in here?"

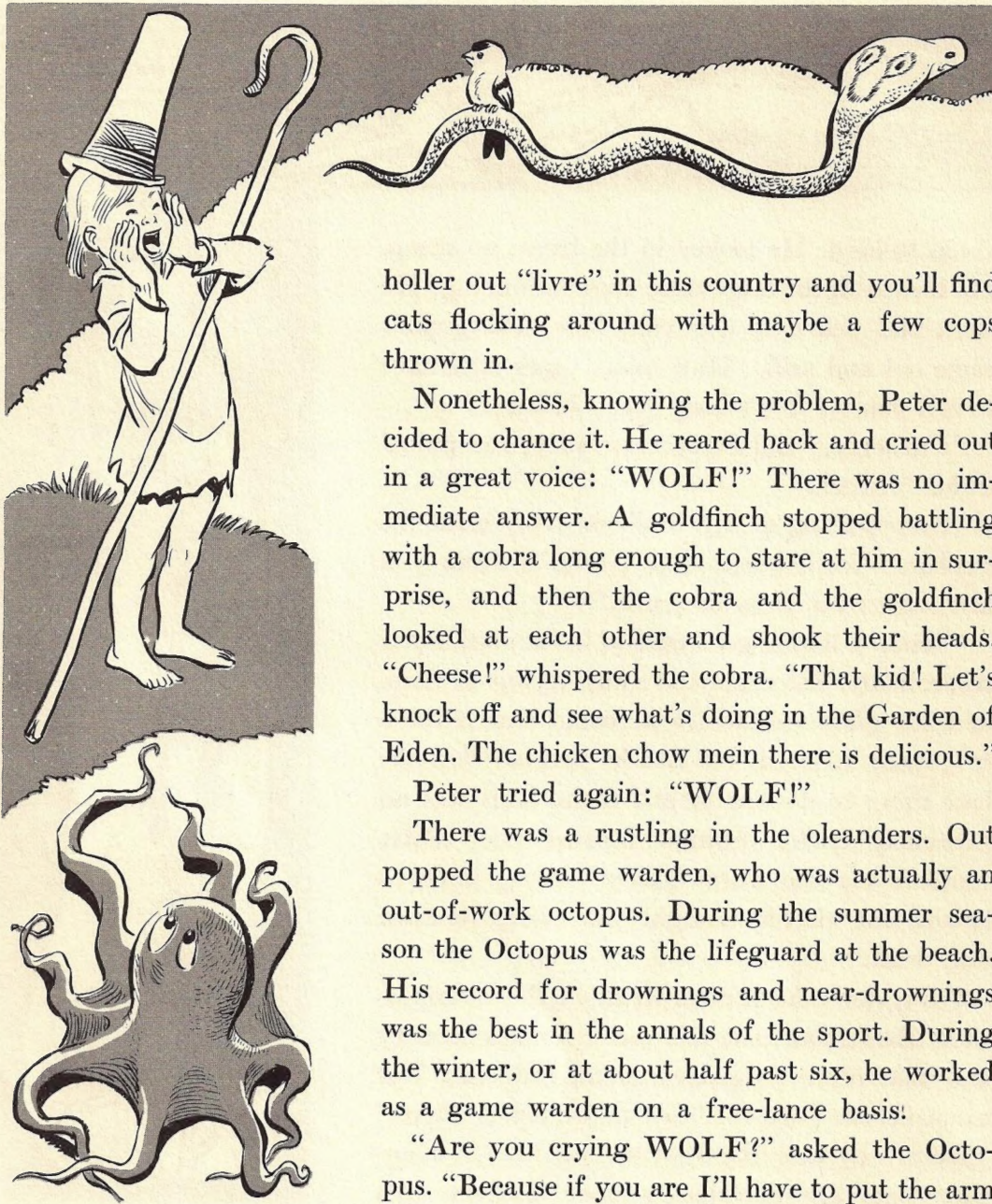
"I'm sorry," said Peter, crestfallen, and pulled at his forelock.

"Stop pulling at my forelock, too," cried the gopher. "You'll recall that I won it from you last week in a pinochle game."

"Yessir, I'll take good care of it," replied Peter respectfully. He wandered away trying to think of some place else where he could search for a few sheep to herd. At last he decided that the best thing to do was to call them. This was an extremely tricky business because poor Peter couldn't say the word "sheep." Every time he howled out what he thought was "sheep" it came out "wolf."

Now, don't for a moment think this is impossible. Remember that this was a foreign country and that other languages sound different. For example, the word for "cat" in French is "livre." That is why cats like what we call liver in English. Cats are notoriously poor spellers. You





holler out "livre" in this country and you'll find cats flocking around with maybe a few cops thrown in.

Nonetheless, knowing the problem, Peter decided to chance it. He reared back and cried out in a great voice: "WOLF!" There was no immediate answer. A goldfinch stopped battling with a cobra long enough to stare at him in surprise, and then the cobra and the goldfinch looked at each other and shook their heads. "Cheese!" whispered the cobra. "That kid! Let's knock off and see what's doing in the Garden of Eden. The chicken chow mein there is delicious."

Peter tried again: "WOLF!"

There was a rustling in the oleanders. Out popped the game warden, who was actually an out-of-work octopus. During the summer season the Octopus was the lifeguard at the beach. His record for drownings and near-drownings was the best in the annals of the sport. During the winter, or at about half past six, he worked as a game warden on a free-lance basis.

"Are you crying WOLF?" asked the Octopus. "Because if you are I'll have to put the arm on you."



"No," replied Peter civilly, "I'm crying sheep."

"I've a friend who cries cockles and mussels," mused the Octopus, "but he is a balladeer and doesn't count. Anyway you can't cry sheep or wolves on Wednesday. I'm afraid I'll have to put the arm on you."

Peter frowned. "*Yesterday* was Wednesday."

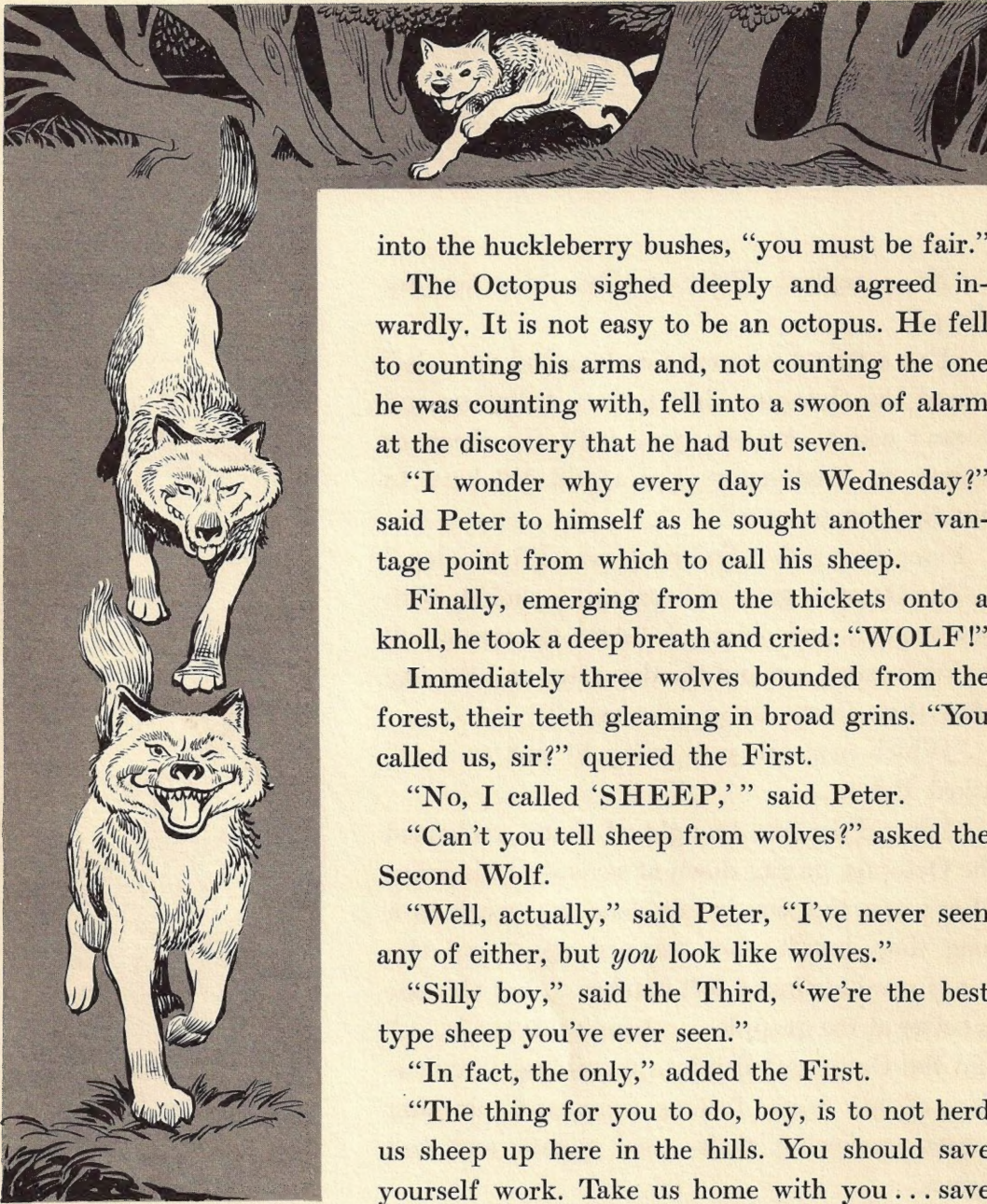
The Octopus gave a disparaging chuckle with one tentacle and observed, "And *tomorrow* will be Wednesday too and the day after and the day after that. Come along quiet now."

"Which arm are you going to put on me?" asked Peter.

"Why, I'd never thought of that," exclaimed the Octopus, gazing down at several of his arms. "Let's see, *this* one hasn't done any work in a long time, but it's not warmed up . . . and *this* one is good against a left-hander . . . but *this* one is better at the grapple . . . though this one is . . ." and the Octopus fell into a mumbling examination of his arms, feeling some and pinching others, reviewing their good points and bad points.

"Above all," cried Peter as he disappeared





into the huckleberry bushes, "you must be fair."

The Octopus sighed deeply and agreed inwardly. It is not easy to be an octopus. He fell to counting his arms and, not counting the one he was counting with, fell into a swoon of alarm at the discovery that he had but seven.

"I wonder why every day is Wednesday?" said Peter to himself as he sought another vantage point from which to call his sheep.

Finally, emerging from the thickets onto a knoll, he took a deep breath and cried: "WOLF!"

Immediately three wolves bounded from the forest, their teeth gleaming in broad grins. "You called us, sir?" queried the First.

"No, I called 'SHEEP,'" said Peter.

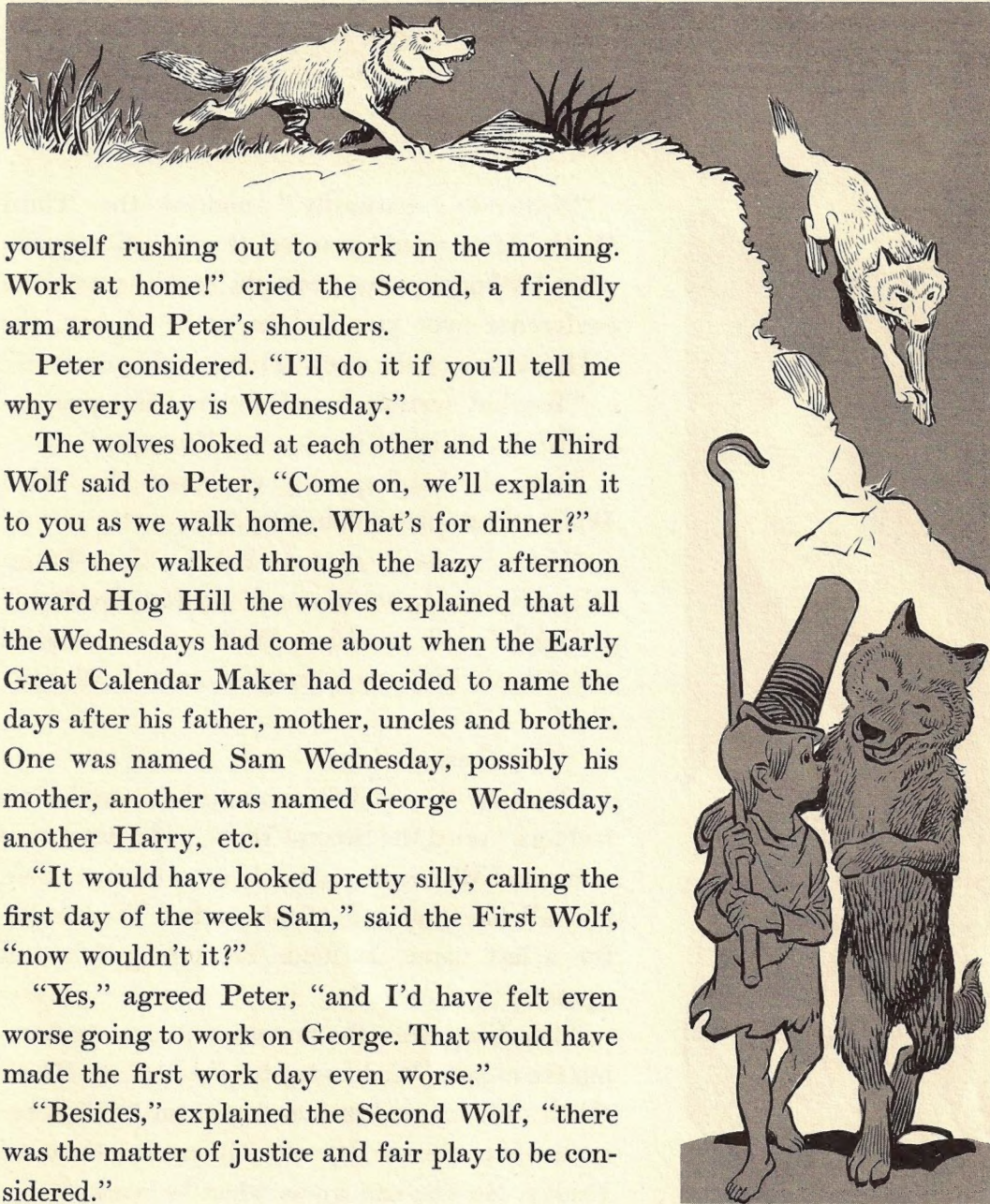
"Can't you tell sheep from wolves?" asked the Second Wolf.

"Well, actually," said Peter, "I've never seen any of either, but *you* look like wolves."

"Silly boy," said the Third, "we're the best type sheep you've ever seen."

"In fact, the only," added the First.

"The thing for you to do, boy, is to not herd us sheep up here in the hills. You should save yourself work. Take us home with you . . . save



yourself rushing out to work in the morning. Work at home!" cried the Second, a friendly arm around Peter's shoulders.

Peter considered. "I'll do it if you'll tell me why every day is Wednesday."

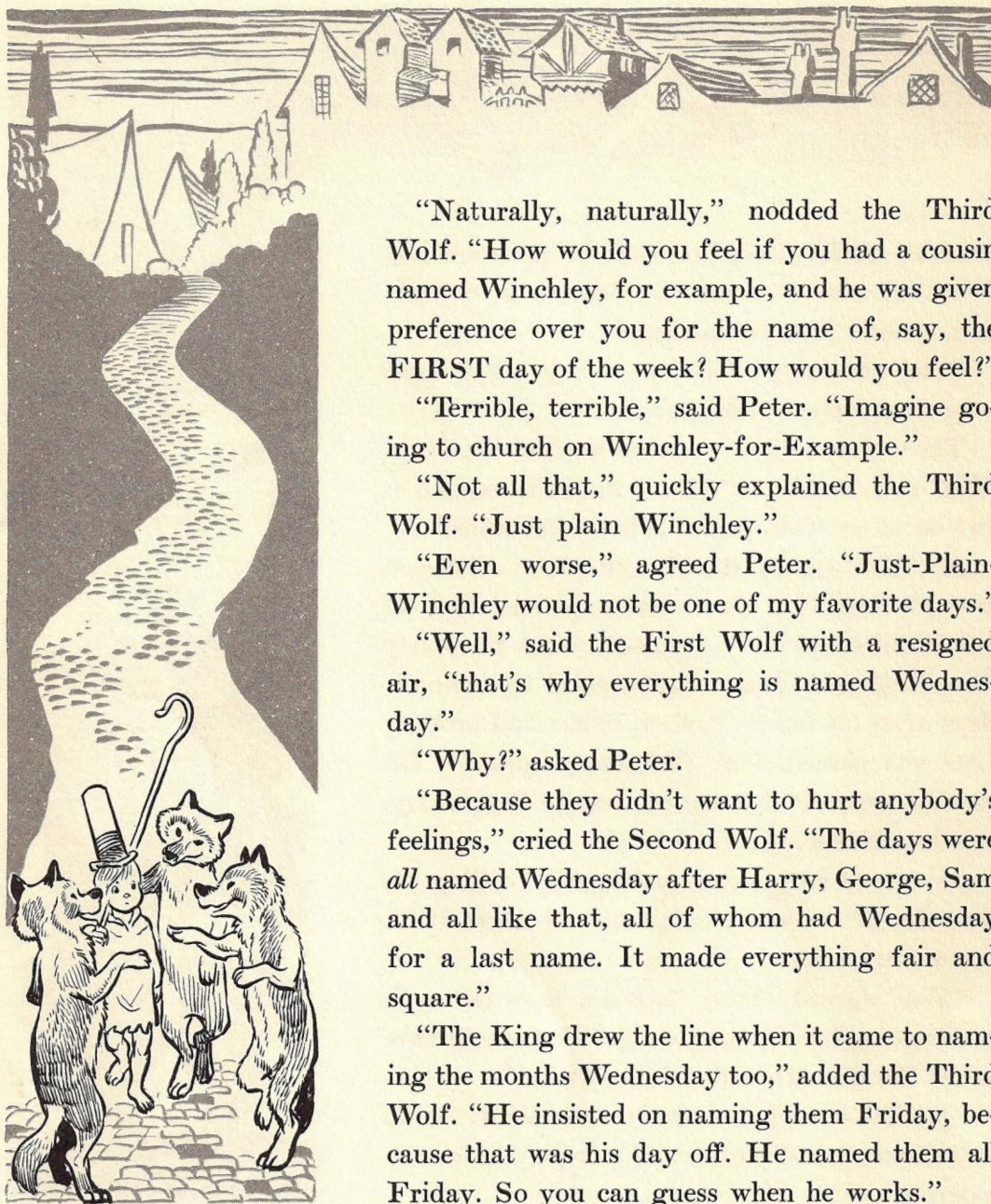
The wolves looked at each other and the Third Wolf said to Peter, "Come on, we'll explain it to you as we walk home. What's for dinner?"

As they walked through the lazy afternoon toward Hog Hill the wolves explained that all the Wednesdays had come about when the Early Great Calendar Maker had decided to name the days after his father, mother, uncles and brother. One was named Sam Wednesday, possibly his mother, another was named George Wednesday, another Harry, etc.

"It would have looked pretty silly, calling the first day of the week Sam," said the First Wolf, "now wouldn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Peter, "and I'd have felt even worse going to work on George. That would have made the first work day even worse."

"Besides," explained the Second Wolf, "there was the matter of justice and fair play to be considered."



"Naturally, naturally," nodded the Third Wolf. "How would you feel if you had a cousin named Winchley, for example, and he was given preference over you for the name of, say, the **FIRST** day of the week? How would you feel?"

"Terrible, terrible," said Peter. "Imagine going to church on Winchley-for-Example."

"Not all that," quickly explained the Third Wolf. "Just plain Winchley."

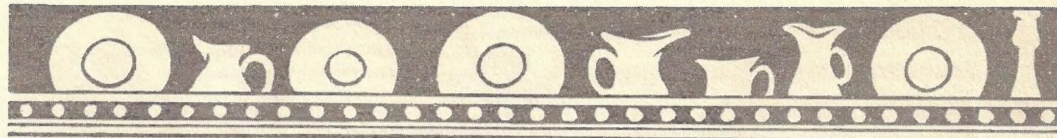
"Even worse," agreed Peter. "Just-Plain-Winchley would not be one of my favorite days."

"Well," said the First Wolf with a resigned air, "that's why everything is named Wednesday."

"Why?" asked Peter.

"Because they didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings," cried the Second Wolf. "The days were *all* named Wednesday after Harry, George, Sam and all like that, all of whom had Wednesday for a last name. It made everything fair and square."

"The King drew the line when it came to naming the months Wednesday too," added the Third Wolf. "He insisted on naming them Friday, because that was his day off. He named them all Friday. So you can guess when he works."



By this time the four had arrived at the house on Hog Hill. Peter swung the door open. "After you, gents," he said politely. The wolves went in. The three stepparents were watching the ball game and eating Peter's jelly crackers.

"Dear Parents," cried Peter after they were all inside, "I've brought the sheep home."

"Yeah," said the First Wolf, helping himself to a jelly cracker. "What's the score, Mac?"

Sleepily the bald-headed parent with the green beard and the black patch said, "You can't bring sheep in the house, son."

"You're exactly right," interposed the Second Wolf, and he looked under the black patch. There was a perfectly good eye under there and it stared back at him with a dawning terror.

"Quoik!" cried the green beard. "WOLVES!"

"*Wolves!*" cried the red-headed parent with the blue beard.

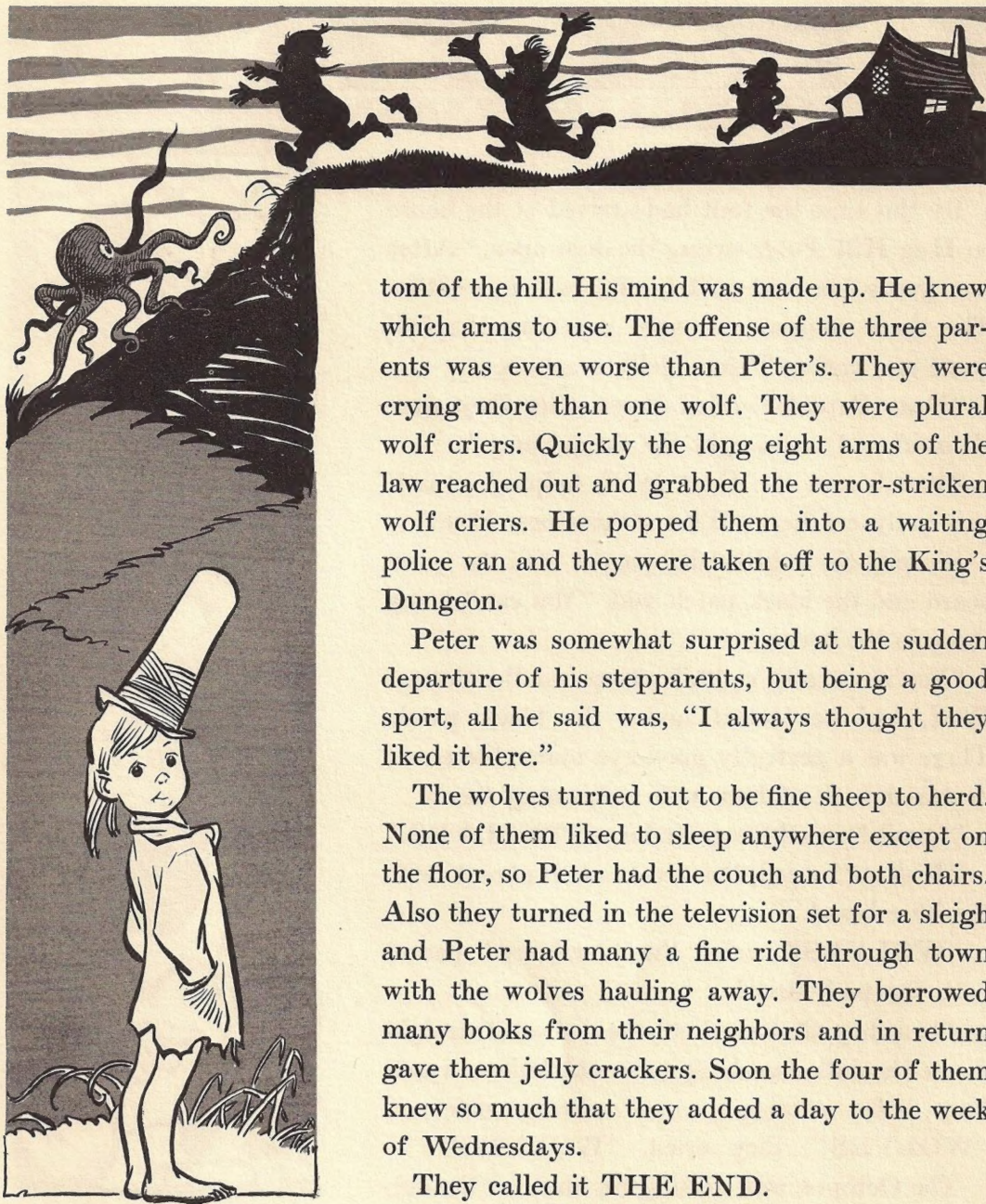
"WOLVES!" cried the blue-haired parent with the pink beard.

Then they all dashed out the door and straight down the hill, knocking over old ladies, upsetting baby carriages, and scaring chickens.

"WOLVES!" they cried. "WOLVES!"

The Octopus was waiting for them at the bot-





tom of the hill. His mind was made up. He knew which arms to use. The offense of the three parents was even worse than Peter's. They were crying more than one wolf. They were plural wolf criers. Quickly the long eight arms of the law reached out and grabbed the terror-stricken wolf criers. He popped them into a waiting police van and they were taken off to the King's Dungeon.

Peter was somewhat surprised at the sudden departure of his stepparents, but being a good sport, all he said was, "I always thought they liked it here."

The wolves turned out to be fine sheep to herd. None of them liked to sleep anywhere except on the floor, so Peter had the couch and both chairs. Also they turned in the television set for a sleigh and Peter had many a fine ride through town with the wolves hauling away. They borrowed many books from their neighbors and in return gave them jelly crackers. Soon the four of them knew so much that they added a day to the week of Wednesdays.

They called it **THE END.**